



ISSN: 2321-8819 (Online) 2348-7186 (Print) Impact Factor: 1.498 Vol. 5, Issue 4, April 2017

Integration of Status Consumption and Theory of Planned Behavior: A Conceptual Framework

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1. Abstract

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is a popular theory to predict human behavior in many social science studies, consumer behaviour being no exception. The TPB in its simplest form postulates that human actions can be predicted by their intentions towards that action, and assumes that this is because humans are rational beings. Despite its popularity, TPB has been criticized in previous research on a number of grounds. TPB is essentially confined to rational behavior of humans. However, humans are not always rational in their behaviors. TPB misses out on personality, motivation, learning, lifestyles, and emotions related constructs. Thus, TPB's utility in predicting intentions has been questioned by previous researchers. It has been empirically found to predict between 35% and 66% of the variance in intentions towards behavior. These findings indicate the presence of additional predictor constructs of purchase intentions either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, products that are perceived as status symbols do not just satisfy functional needs of the consumers but also their social and status needs. Therefore, the current study integrates status consumption with the three independent variables of TPB, namely attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control in to a single framework and proposes that addition of status

consumption will increase the predictive power of TPB for products perceived as status symbols by consumers.

Key Words: Theory of Planned behavior, Status Consumption, Purchase Intentions

2. Introduction

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) came up with the theory of reasoned action (TRA) which posited that behavioral intentions can predict actual behavior with the assumption that humans are rational when systematic information is available to them. Although TRA recognizes that perfect relationship between intentions and behavior does not always exist however intentions can serve as an approximate predictor of human behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001). However, intentions do not indicate why an action was performed. It was therefore felt necessary to include two other predictors of intentions, namely, attitude toward the action and subjective norm (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Ajzen (1991) extended the TRA in to the TPB because the original model had certain limitations in terms of predicting behavior that individuals did not have full 'volitional' (Ajzen, 1991). Hence the TPB adds an addition predictor construct of intentions and behavior called Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC).

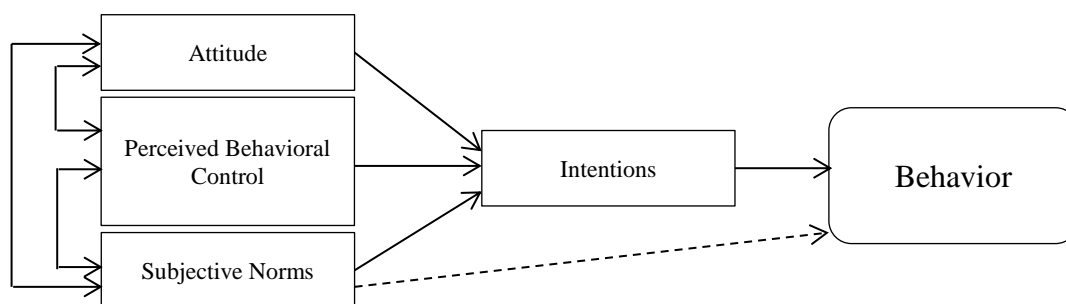


Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2011)

Over the years, TPB has distinguished itself to be one of the most popular theories in social and behavioral disciplines. It has been used in diverse contexts such as intentions to consume breakfast by adolescents (Mullan, Wong & Kothe, 2013), Internet purchasing (George, 2004), and technology usage (Teo & Lee, 2010) to name a few.

In summary, the TPB states that the attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control of individuals all impact behavior and these relationships are mediated by intentions. In addition, PBC may also have a direct relationship with behavior.

1. Intentions

Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) conceptualized intention as “a proximal” antecedent to behavior, and as an individual’s readiness to perform an action”. It has been empirically verified that Intentions strongly predict behavior when they are measured just prior to a behavior, such as purchase of a product (Chen, 2015). However, it has also been found that individual may not translate their intentions in to behavior for reasons such as lack of skill, knowledge, and completion between resources or responsibilities (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

2. Attitude

Ajzen and Fishbein (1991) state that an individual’s attitude towards a behavior is determined by his/her own evaluation of favorable or unfavorable outcomes. According to them, people are more likely to perform actions if their attitude towards engaging in that action is more positive. Similarly, according to Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2005) attitude is the evaluation of an individual regarding performing a certain behavior, such as buying a product.

3. Subjective Norms

Subjective Norm refers to the perception of a person about social pressure, i.e. whether a particular behavior will be seen as acceptable/unacceptable or favorable/unfavorable by significant others (Ajzen, 1991). Teo and Lee, (2010) refines the description by stating that

subjective norm in the TPB is “one’s perception of whether people important to the individual think the behavior should be performed”. Ajzen asserted that subjective norms influence intentions to perform a particular action.

4. Perceived Behavioral Control

The degree of PBC measures the perception of a person regarding the availability or unavailability of necessary opportunities. Knowledge and skills etc. that are necessary for performing the behavior (Ajzen, 2010). Facilitating or constraining conditions such as money, time, or technology are realistically expected from the consumer in order to perform a certain action (Taylor & Todd, 1995). Therefore, purchase intentions towards purchase will be higher when consumers perceive to have enough control over their buying.

3. Criticism of the Theory of Planned Behavior

Compared to some other competing models, Ajzen’s (1991) theory does not account for emotional variables like excitement, fear, anxiety, impulsive behavior and mood (see Armitage & Conner, 2001). The TPB is essentially confined to rational behavior of humans. However, humans are not always rational in their behaviors. Therefore, the theory does not fully take in to account emotions, personality, lifestyle etc. that also shape human behavior. A meta-analysis of TPB based studies has identified more problems with the theory in terms of varied and often conflicting findings (Cooke & French, 2008). Cooke and French (2008) had therefore concluded that even more background factors to intentions must exist. This is consistent with Ajzen’s own assertion that if there are reasonable theoretical justifications and if they can capture significant portion of the so far unaccounted variance in intentions, then the TPB is open for addition of other predicting variables (Ajzen, 2014).

The TPB’s utility and usefulness in predicting intentions has been widely examined by other researchers. For example, 58 health related studies were reviewed by Godin and Kok (1996), who found that the theory only predicted 66% of the



variance in intentions towards behavior. Another research, Sutton (2007) reviewed findings of different TPB related meta-analyses from 1991-2002 and concluded that the theory only accounted for 35-50% of the variance in intentions towards behavior. A meta-analytic review investigating 185 empirical studies on TPB, from various behavioral domains found that the Ajzen's theory accounted for only 39% of the variance in intentions (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Mullan et al. (2013) has also stated that TPB cannot explain a large proportion of variance in intentions. From the above discussion it is evident that other as of yet unexplored predictors of intentions exist (Cabaniss, 2014). It is therefore no surprise that prior studies have linked purchase intentions with many additional predictor constructs. Some notable examples include:

Customer satisfaction (Hong-Youl Ha et al., 2014), brand love (Fetscherin et al., 2014), uncertainty avoidance (Wolff et al., 2011), trust (Jiménez & Martín, 2014), culture (Darsono & Susana, 2014); government support (Tan & Teo, 2000), demographic factors (Tho et al., 2008; Bahaee, Michael & Pisani, 2009), and religiosity (Rahman, Hashim, & Mustafa, 2015)

In the current study, it is proposed that apart from attitude, subjective norms, and PBC, Status Consumption also contributes directly to consumers' Intention to purchase. Various relationships between the afore-mentioned variables are described below. Hypotheses may be drawn on the basis of these propositions, paving the way for empirical testing.

4. Integration of Status Consumption and the Theory of Planned Behavior

Bourdieu (1989) had pointed out that most consumption theories and resultant frameworks tend to disregard irrational elements of consumer behavior as humans are assumed to be rational being. According to Shukla (2010), status consumption is irrational or psychological in expression as well as in motivation. Therefore, it should be treated as a separate construct to rational constructs such as Ajzen's Subjective Norms (Ajzen, 1991). Products perceived as status symbols do not just satisfy functional needs of the consumers but also their social and emotional needs (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). However, Shukla (2010) has stated that literature in this domain has failed to address and fill this gap.

One of the principal criticisms of the TPB and other similar reason based theories and models is that they are too focused on rationality, and do not sufficient address irrational cognitive or affective processes that humans frequently employ. These

processes are known to result in biased judgments and behavioral decisions (Conner & Armitage, 2001).

Ajzen (2011) has responded to this particular criticism by stating that the TBP draws a more complicated and nuanced picture than is usually understood. He has attempted to demonstrate that "irrational" social and emotional constructs and processes that appear as beyond the scope of the theory can in reality be accommodated by it. Explaining this notion, Ajzen (2011) has stated that TPB makes no explicit assumption that consumer beliefs are always formed rationally. Even if an individual's beliefs about a behavior are biased, inaccurate or outright irrational, those beliefs can still influence attitudes as well as behavioral intentions (Geraerts et al., 2008). The otherwise "irrational" constructs have therefore been integrated extensively in to the theory of planned behavior by previous researchers. For example, Delaney and White (2015) have found that the TPB predictive power increases significantly by adding moral norm, altruism, and knowledge to the model. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2015) have added religiosity and Wolff et al. (2011) have added Uncertainty Avoidance to their extended models of TPB. Darsono & Susana (2014) has identified and studied Culture as an addition to the TPB in a car buying context in Indonesia. Similarly, Fetscherin et al. (2014) found that brand love is a predictor of purchase intentions among other independent variables.

Moreover, consumers make product buying decision based on the status conferred by owning or consuming that product (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). This means that status should also impact intentions towards buying. However, to the best of our knowledge, status consumption has not been linked with Purchase Intentions directly in an academic research. An indirect significant relationship between status consumption and purchase intentions was reported by Latter, Phau, and Marchegiani (2010) but this relationship is mediated by emotional value and consumer's brand judgements about luxury apparel brands. Some previous studies have also linked and tested status consumption with other marketing and consumer evaluation variables. Among these studies, O'Cass and Frost (2002) found that status consumption contributes significantly to shaping consumer preferences for many types of products. Similarly, Scheetz (2004) confirmed that the likelihood of purchasing a particular brand varies positively with its status. Also, Mai and Tambyah (2011) predict that status consumption has a significant influence on product ownership. Finally, Eastman & Eastman (2015) has recently encouraged further research on the consequences of status consumption such as



purchase intentions. Therefore, there are sufficient theoretical grounds for integrating status

consumption in to the theory of planned behavior.

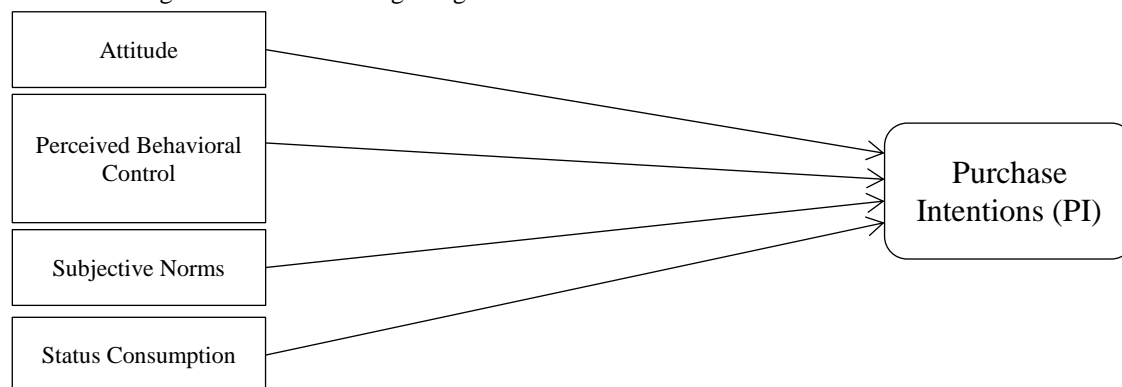


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework

1. Attitude and Purchase Intentions

Prior research by and large is unanimous on the positive relationship between attitude and intentions (Huang et al., 2004; Javalgi et al., 2005; Shankarmahesh, 2006; Morven et al., 2007; Bahae & Pisani, 2009; Cote et al., 2012. However, previous research also indicates that the strength of this relationship improves with “greater specificity” (Myers, 1999). Hence, it is suggested that the effect of attitudinal factors which affect purchase intentions specific to a product category in a developing country setting be investigated. Therefore, it is proposed that:

Proposition 1: There is a significant relationship between consumer Attitude and Intentions to Purchase

2. Subjective Norms and Purchase Intentions

The second predictor construct to TPB namely subjective norm is also postulated to influence behavioral intentions. Literature provides empirical support for this proposition (Biscaia et al., 2013; Mir, Rizwan & Saboor, 2012; Javalgi et al., 2005). However, some researchers have found quite the opposite results. Nisbet and Gick (2008) have shown that previous researchers are divided on the results of predicative power of Subjective Norms on Intentions. Cialdini (2003) and Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) asserted that this inconsistency may be removed by using measures that include both perceived injunctive norms (what should be done based on approval of significant others) and descriptive norms (what actions people normally perform) (Cialdini, 2003; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Therefore, it is proposed that:

Proposition 2: There is a significant relationship between Subjective Norm and Intention to Purchase

3. Perceived Behavioral Control and Purchase Intentions

As discussed earlier, perceived behavioral control is one of the determinant factors of behavioral intention according to TPB (Ajzen, 1991). Individual will perform a certain behavior if they believe that they have enough resources, confidence and abilities to perform that behavior.

There are numerous empirical studies in different fields which have tested the relationship between PBC and intention. Prior studies have proved that PBC is positively related to behavioral intention (Taylor & Todd, 1995; Darsono & Susana, 2014). In contrast, Khalifa and Shen (2008) reached a different finding in which perceived behavioral control does not significantly influence behavioral intention. These researchers have proposed that the contradiction in finding may be due to product familiarity, which increases confidence and hence decrease the effect of self-efficacy. These contradictions in PBC-Intention relationship beg further investigation in to the relationship.

Proposition 3: There is a significant relationship between PBC and Purchase Intentions

Status Consumption and Purchase Intentions

According to Eastman and Eastman (2015), consumers seek to purchase goods and services for the status they confer. It is important to note that consumers engage in this behavior no matter what his/her objective income or social class may be. Mason (2002) states that status consumption has by and large been neglected in the development of theories on consumption behavior and provided two reasons for this. According to the researcher, most consumption behavior theories rely on rational elements of human behavior, and tend to ignore irrational or psychological elements of human psyche, for instance impulsive buying, which are central to consumer decision-making in many instances. Secondly, most consumption related theories rely on a product’s functional utility as a vital reason for consumers to evaluate



and purchase a product (Mason, 2002; Shukla, 2010).

To the best of our knowledge, status consumption has not been linked with Purchase Intentions directly although an indirect relationship has been demonstrated before in the context of luxury apparel brands in a developed market (Latter et al., 2010). It may be noted that Subjective Norms from the TPB is conceptually a distinct construct. Subjective Norms describe how favorably or unfavorably an individual's significant others perceive his/her performing of a certain behavior and does not necessarily represent whether performing the behavior will bestow status upon the individual or not. On the other hand, Status Consumption is conceptualized as consuming products that grant status to the consumer as well as his/her social circle (Eastman & Eastman, 2015). Furthermore, Eastman and Eastman (2015) have recently encouraged further research on the consequences of status consumption such as

purchase intentions. Therefore, following proposition is made:

Proposition 4: There is a significant relationship between Status Consumption and Purchase Intentions

5. Conclusion

The TPB is a well-established theory when its primary assumption that humans make rational decisions is met. However, in the case of purchasing luxury brands where emotional and symbolic values of consumers may be defining feature of their purchase decision, the TPB has demonstrable shortcomings. In this backdrop, this paper has proposed an improvement to the TPB by integrating status consumption as an additional predictor of intentions, particularly in the context of luxury brand purchase to the predictors already postulated by the TPB. Theoretical justifications for modifying the TPB in this way are presented. Empirical evidence may be collected to support the propositions made in this paper.

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